



A *Community Conversation* brings together members of a group, organization or neighborhood to join in a facilitated discussion of a short reading. Conversations are centered on a shared text and a set of thought-provoking questions, encouraging participants to reflect on the issues raised by the reading and discuss how they impact our lives and communities.

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## Resources for MLK Day

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**'The Drum Major Instinct' (excerpt)**

**A Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta  
February 4, 1968**

...If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's your new definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it . . . by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great. Because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. And you can be that servant...

...Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator—that something we call death. We all think about it. And every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral.

And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. Every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" And I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize; that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards; that's not important. Tell him not to mention where I went to school.

I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

And that's all I want to say . . . if I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain...

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## Discussion Questions for

**'The Drum Major Instinct' (excerpt)  
A Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta,  
February 4, 1968**

- Is Dr. King being sincere, in your view, when he repeatedly says that it is 'wonderful' to want recognition? What is wonderful about the desire for recognition?
- What does King mean by 'service'?
- Why does King stress the things you don't have to be or to have in order to serve?
- What, according to Dr. King, do you have to be or to have in order to serve? Do you agree that these are the things one needs in order to serve?
- Why, when King talks about the eulogy he envisions for himself, does he say he 'tried to give his life serving' rather than simply 'gave his life serving'? Why does he continually insert this word, 'tried', throughout the passage selected here?
- What does it mean 'to love and serve humanity'? How does one do this?
- What, according to your religious or philosophical tradition, is "a heart full of grace"? Where does that kind of heart come from?
- What, according to Dr. King, are 'the shallow things that will not matter'? Do you agree that these things are shallow?
- What, in King's view, gives service its depth and significance?
- What kind of service -- if any -- does your religious or philosophical tradition direct you to do, and why?
- Why does there seem to be such a strong link, for King, between death and service?
- How does your religious or philosophical tradition move you to think about the relation between how you live your life and what comes after "that something we call death"?

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## Discussion Questions for

**'The Drum Major Instinct' (excerpt)  
A Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.  
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- To what extent do you find King's exercise—thinking about what will be said at one's death—productive?
- Is it important for your service that it be recognized? If so, who should recognize its importance, and why?
- What do you make of King's "new definition of greatness"?
- Dr. King says near the end of this passage that he just wants "to leave a committed life behind." To what would you most like your life to be committed, and what form might this commitment take?
- What impact do you hope to make through your service? What would you like your community legacy to be?

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## **Tips for Hosting a Community Conversation**

Community conversations are simple gatherings that encourage thoughtful, engaged dialogue using a short reading to foster discussion. While there is no wrong way to host a community conversation, these basic tips should help you make the most of this opportunity. The goal is a comfortable, lively discussion -- we hope the following suggestions will help you create an inviting environment for you and your community.

### **For Host Site Coordinators:**

- Find a facilitator to shape the conversation. A facilitator is simply someone from your organization or community who is willing to ask the discussion questions, call on participants and watch the clock.
- Expect a healthy conversation to last 90 minutes.
- Arrange the room so that participants can easily see one another and be heard by all.
- If you are able, provide simple refreshments for your group like juice, coffee and cookies.
- Nametags help the facilitator encourage participation.
- If your group is larger than 25, consider separating into smaller groups to allow for everyone to participate.
- Consider asking participants to offer their feedback through a simple evaluation form. This will help you determine whether it's valuable for you to host future community conversations.

### **For Facilitators:**

- Remember that the object of community conversation facilitation is not to elicit correct answers or direct interpretation but to moderate a discussion through reflective questioning and listening.
- Participants should do most of the talking. As a facilitator, you should listen carefully, move the conversation forward and, if necessary, redirect with a new question or a new approach.
- Establish some basic guidelines with the group: Raise hands to share, be respectful, and focus your comments on the reading.
- Introduce yourself at the beginning of the session and ask each participant to do the same and to share a small detail, i.e. where they're from, why they chose to attend, what interests them about this topic.
- Begin by reading the text out loud together. You can ask for volunteers or try round robin, with each person reading a few sentences.
- Try an opening exercise to help participants get comfortable: Ask a discussion question and encourage participants to share their thoughts in pairs and report each other's thoughts to the group.
- Start the group conversation with a simple question to ease into the process.
- Continue to use the discussion questions provided by the Council to explore the reading in greater depth. You do not have to address the questions in order, rather use them as you feel is appropriate for your group and the nature of your discussion.
- If the conversation gets off topic, you can gently ease the group back by asking questions about the text, i.e. "What does the reading tell us about that?" or "Where in the reading does the author express that idea?"
- Wrap up by asking participants for final thoughts and thanking them for their participation.

## Implementation Checklist

### At least eight weeks before event

- ☐ Download materials from Council website: <http://www.nyhumanities.org/conversations>
- ☐ Determine who will facilitate your event
- ☐ Set event date and time
- ☐ Select the location of your event
- ☐ Create a recruitment plan:
  - ☐ Identify partner or community organizations to help you promote your event
  - ☐ Finalize the program flyer and/or press release (these documents are available in Word format on the [Conversations Admin](#) page)
  - ☐ Plan to promote your event via social media outlets

### Six weeks before event

- ☐ Distribute recruitment materials
- ☐ Begin recruiting participants at your organization
- ☐ Post flyers and make phone calls to partner organizations and potential participants
- ☐ Include event information on your website and newsletter

### Three weeks before event

- ☐ Begin registering participants
- ☐ Continue to follow-up with partner organizations

### One week before event

- ☐ Continue to recruit and register participants
- ☐ Follow-up with registered participants by phone or email
- ☐ Plan event implementation and timeline
- ☐ Buy refreshments, nametags, and other materials

### Day of event

- ☐ Set up event space (a circle or semi-circle encourages conversation)
- ☐ Set up check-in table where participants can sign in and put on a name tag
- ☐ Set up refreshments
- ☐ Greet participants and assign someone to greet and direct late-comers

### After the event

- ☐ Fill out the online host site evaluation
- ☐ The stipend will arrive no more than 4 weeks after you submit the host site evaluation